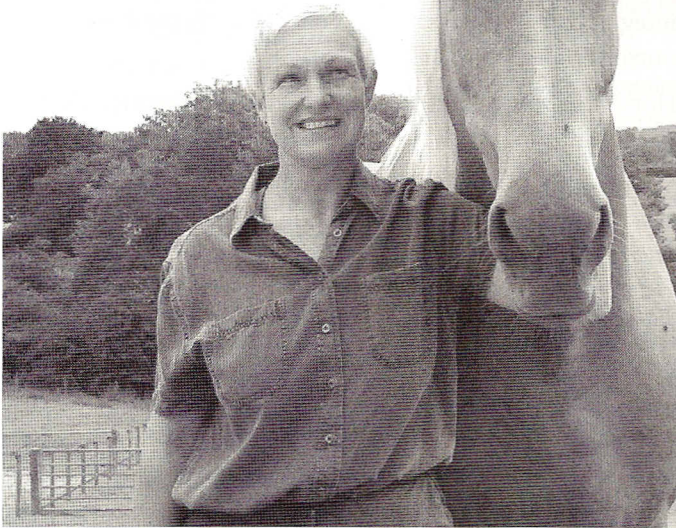


Horses, my teachers

Sue Newport



Awareness is the key to developing feel; be in the present; experiment with yourself and the horse; focus on the 'means whereby', not the goal.

Perry Wood

These words from a book called *Real Riding*, refer to the riding of a horse but they could just as well be describing our work with craniosacral therapy.

Horses cannot communicate with words, so to have some idea of their state of health we can:

- look at how they behave
- listen to their owner's observations
- use our knowledge of their natural behaviour
- use our own experience in handling, observing and treating horses

A lot of the time they do speak loud and clear, but we need to be listening in much the same way as we listen to our client's body during a treatment.

I have owned horses for many years and have four at present, whose ages range from 2 to 27 years old. While I was doing my CST training I tried to use what I was learning on my horses to see what I could pick up. Placing my hands on their sacrum or cranium, trying to feel the movements of the bones and the tides was not at all successful, and eventually I gave up trying. Following my graduation I attended further training which helped me to develop my CST skills to a point which met the needs of the horse. For me this meant having to let go of everything in my mind, to be in stillness and in the present, and to have an awareness that has no limits. Some of these skills I have yet to achieve, but the more

equine work I do, the easier it becomes. My experience in this way of working with horses is one of movement always changing, and even within stillpoints a sense of change happening at a very deep level.

Looking back on my early treatments with horses, I would put my hands on their body and watch for things to happen so I could explain to the owner what was taking place. I felt that if I didn't know what was going on, then the owner may not have had confidence in my ability as a craniosacral therapist, or in CST as a treatment. Results are not always glaringly obvious with horses at the time of treatment, and in my experience many horse owners are not sufficiently in tune with their animals to notice the small changes that occur. The one thing I always remember when my insecurities arise, or I am unsure, is to let go of everything and trust in the process.

Letting go

My first lesson came one day when I treated a horse whom I now own. He would move away from me in the stable when I put my hands on him. So realising that he didn't want me touching him, I went to the opposite corner of the stable to think about what to do. I held my hands up to see if I could feel anything, and from where I was sitting I slowly started to pick up the patterning in his body, and feel the pulls and twists and deep stillpoints as his body started to release. It seems that horses prefer me not to make physical contact, unless they ask by coming up and presenting whatever part of their body they want touching. One horse did this, turning 180 degrees in front of me, before pushing his hindquarters very gently into my hands, staying there until the session reached its natural conclusion and he walked away.

I was almost overwhelmed by the sadness she was holding

The experience of no physical contact, yet being able to listen and feel what was going on, made me realise that there is something special in the space between ourselves and the person or animal we are working with.

Space

Horses have a huge energetic field: they are always in the present and alert to everything going on around them, because they are potentially prey. Their survival depends on their ability to outrun or fight off a predator. Humans are seen as predators. Our energy field is smaller and our focused attitude is a threat to their survival instincts. So when one goes into a stable to treat a horse with a stiff back and the attention is on tuning in to the sacrum, that intention is very powerful within the horse's energetic field. This was demonstrated beautifully when a friend who had done the first part of an equine course wanted to practise on her 18-year-old horse. My friend and I worked with a very wide field of awareness. She focused on the sacrum and at that moment I felt his body shut down.

When she took her awareness out and away from his body, his system opened up again. I experienced a similar thing in training when someone was working on me and their focus was too intense; it produced an uncomfortable feeling of pressure in my head and body.

Listening

A grey mare was standing in a stable next to her owner, whom I had just treated. I was leaning on the door idly looking at her when in my head I heard, 'No-one listens to me!' I was taken aback but knew it came from the horse. I enquired of the owner whether the mare had received any treatments and was told she had seen an equine craniosacral therapist and a healer, both of whom had helped a little. I volunteered to give her a session. Sometimes we forget to really listen from our heart when treating patients, but this was in the front of my mind when I treated this horse in her field. I just listened in as open a way as I could to what her body had to say, and I was almost overwhelmed by the sadness she was holding. As I listened to this emotion, her body started to release some of the trauma. Her eyes started to soften, and after a few more sessions she was more relaxed and a much happier horse.

Trauma

The physical problems experienced by a horse often seem to be underpinned by emotional attachment to a trauma. Horses are very sensitive creatures who experience a wide range of emotions similar to ours. Most negative emotions are linked to traumatic experiences in their lives where they have not been able to exercise their fight or flight response and have gone into a shock or freeze state. This becomes locked in their tissues. Incidents such as castration, road accidents, falling into something and being unable to get out, early separation from their mother and aggressive handling by humans are examples. These can cause physical symptoms, just as they can in us, and they are often overlooked by vets who, like doctors, tend to treat symptoms.

One of my horses kept getting stiffness in his back. I had given him several treatments and during one session he lay down flat out in the stable after releasing something in his haunches. His body then started to shake, he had a far away look in his eye, and then his legs started to twitch. I knew this was connected to his castration, although I thought that he had already processed it in previous sessions. This was the final release of that trauma. (He was castrated in the field; the vet gave him heavy sedation so he was lying down on the ground. Halfway through the procedure he started to come out of the sedation and tried to get up. He was given more sedative, but was already in fight or flight mode. He wasn't fully sedated for the rest of the procedure, so the whole traumatic experience became trapped in his body.) Since that session he has had very little trouble with his back.

Conclusion

We are fortunate to practise a therapy where there is freedom to refine our skills for the continuing development of the therapy as a whole. Horses have much to teach us about healing. They have no agenda, no judgement; they allow us total freedom in the space between their world and ours to let go of everything and just be. In this place we can learn to truly listen and be an integral part of the healing process of both the horse and ourselves.

Horses are my greatest teachers and have given me deep insight into my work as a craniosacral therapist.

Sue would be pleased to hear from anybody who would like to share their experiences about working with animals or anybody interested in further information.

Please email her at suenewportCST@hotmail.com or telephone 01403 25026.

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